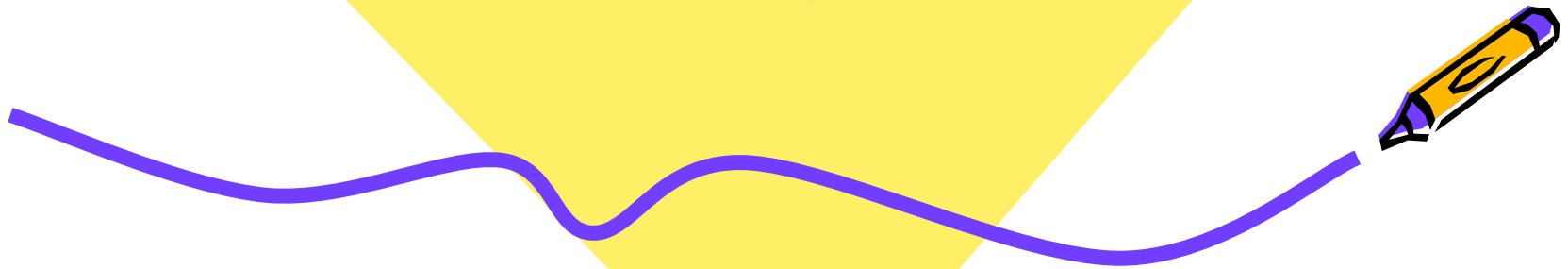


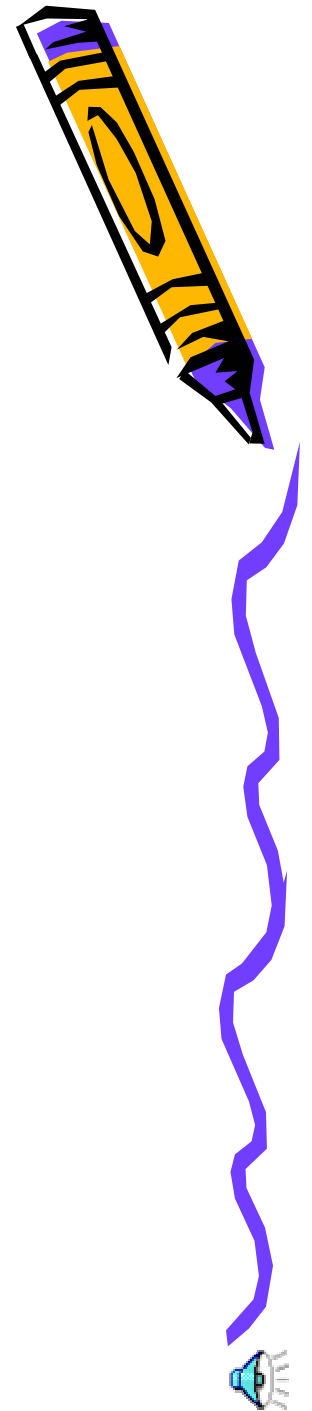
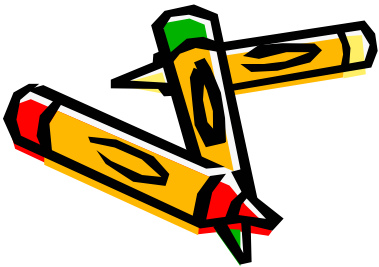
# Living with Learning Disabilities

An exercise in frustration



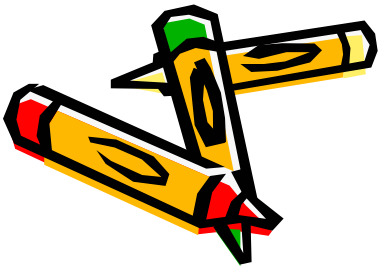
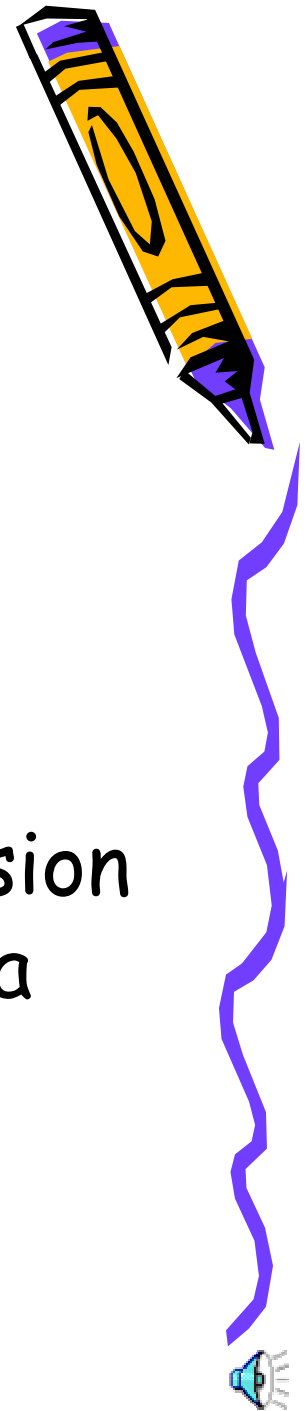
My name is Gretchen Alyce  
Shapiro and you can't see  
my disability.

I have Learning Disabilities,  
and always will.



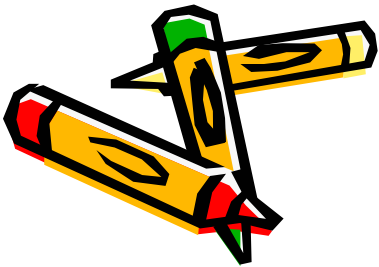
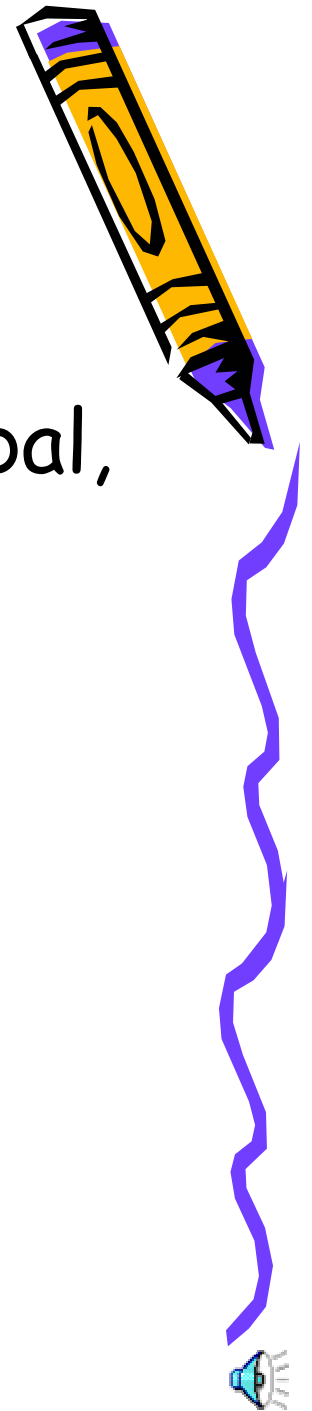
# The Full Diagnosis - A College Evaluation

- Dyscalculia (arithmetic problems)
- Written Expressive Language Disorder (with Spelling)
- Auditory memory deficit
- Very poor oral reading comprehension and below average reading speed (a reading disability)



# The Full Diagnosis - A College Evaluation (continued)

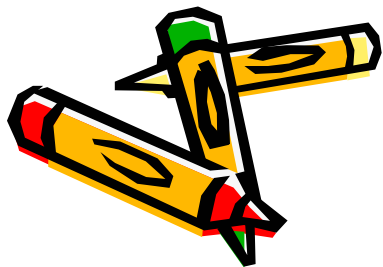
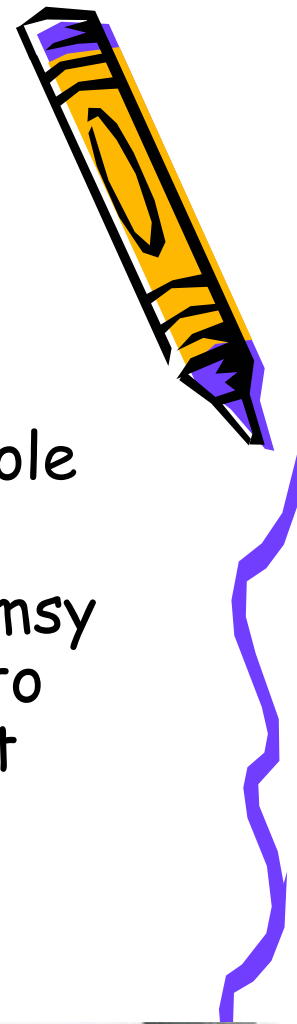
- Poor organization of auditory, verbal, and abstract visual data
- Attentional issues (ADD, predominantly inattentive)





# Early Issues

- A soft neurological sign - I would turn my whole head rather than moving my eyes.
- Poor hand-eye coordination. I was a very clumsy child who avoided crawling. When I learned to walk steps, I did so right foot down, left foot meeting it, rather than foot over foot.<sup>1</sup>



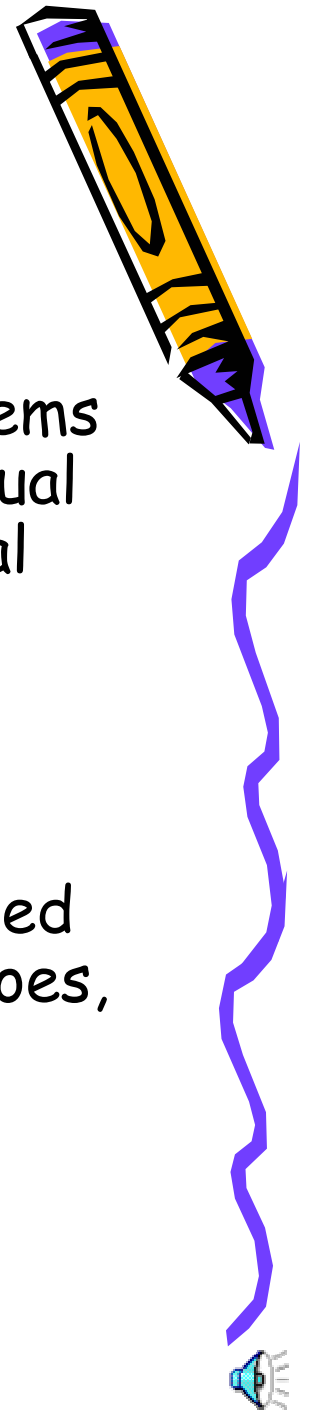
1. Today they call this dyspraxia a sensory processing disorder or SPD, but back then they just told me I had poor hand-eye Coordination.



# Elementary years

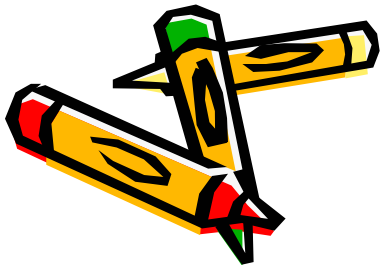
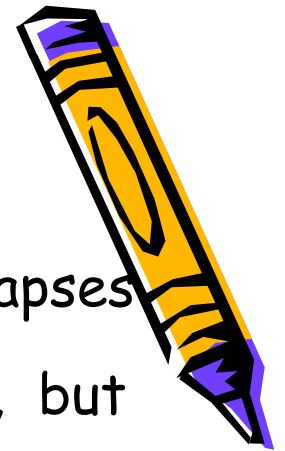
## Grades 1 - 3 (1970-1973)

- Every day I had a pull-out of some kind.
- An evaluation in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade showed I had problems in my sequencing abilities and auditory and visual perception/discrimination (indications of visual and auditory processing deficits, especially combined with my later diagnosed auditory memory deficit).
- I was very clumsy, having poor hand-eye coordination both fine and gross which affected my ability to learn to write, learn to tie my shoes, or do well in physical education.
- Difficulty learning to tell time.



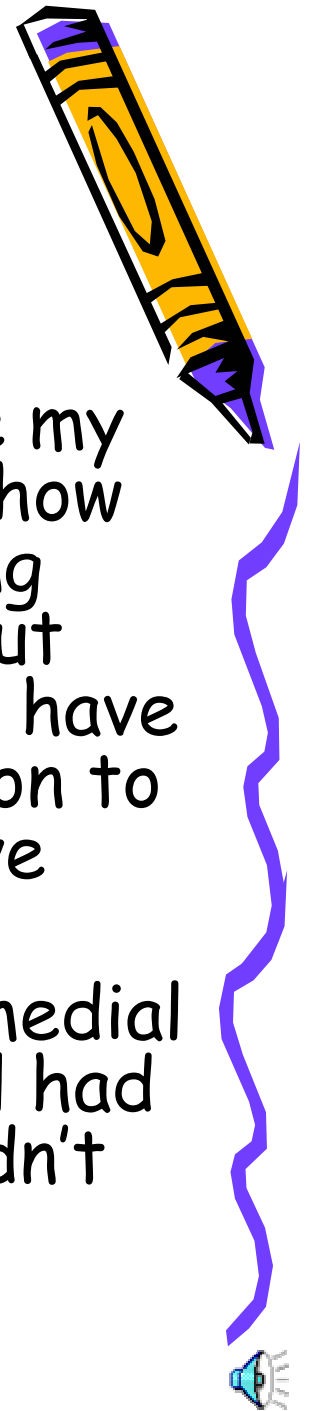
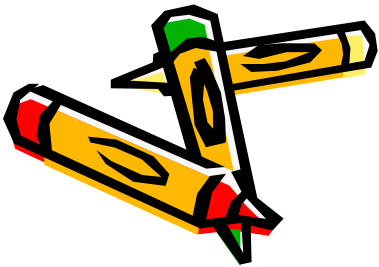
# Grades 1-3 continued

- It was noted that I day dreamed and had frequent lapses in my attention span in class, as well as having "considerable motor-overflow" during the evaluation, but ADD was not then diagnosed
- Mrs. Susman worked with me in the visual-perception program (which I knew as hand-eye coordination class). This helped my visual perception as well as my coordination problems. My eyes learned to track a ball without moving my head, and so to track words on a page. She also helped me learn to write. She succeeded. Though I am still klutzy, I am not as clumsy as before and I can write legibly with effort (the longer I write, the worse it gets).
- My poor hand-eye coordination meant I was the last one picked in sports in elementary school and beyond.



# Grades 1- 3 continued

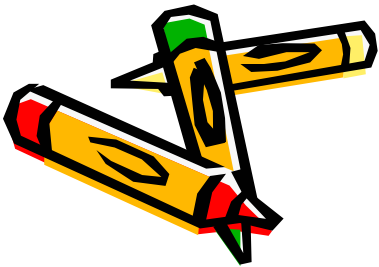
- I had difficulty learning to read, where my peers did not. Mrs. Burnum taught me how in an intensive, specific remedial reading class. She succeeded. Today, I read, but slower than non-disabled people. I also have comprehension issues, something common to people with reading disabilities who have early intervention.
- Once in a while, someone taught me remedial arithmetic. That didn't succeed. I still had to use my fingers. I just couldn't get the tables in my brain.





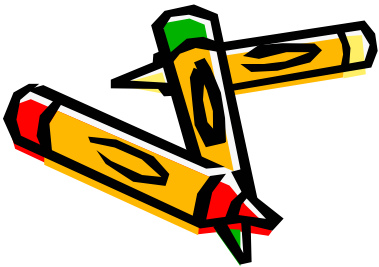
# Grades 1- 3 continued

- I was always knocked out in the first round of any spelling or math bee. I dreaded those; it was so embarrassing.
- Learning was frustrating. I was often in tears because I just couldn't get it.
- I was still not diagnosed as LD. I thought I was stupid. My sister and brother called me slow.



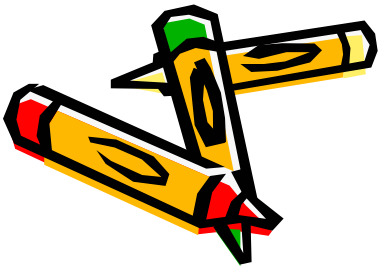
# Elementary - Grade 4 (1973-1974)

- Having "graduated" my 3 remedial classes, I was thrown to the wolves in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Simple composition was introduced. I choked.
- Mom and Dad got me tested, but this was before PL 94-142 (which passed in 1975). A discrepancy existed between ability and achievement (I struggled in the lower group in math, for example, but testing showed that I should have been performing at the 7.5 grade level), but since I was working within grade level, and there was no space in the resource room for me, I fell between the cracks.

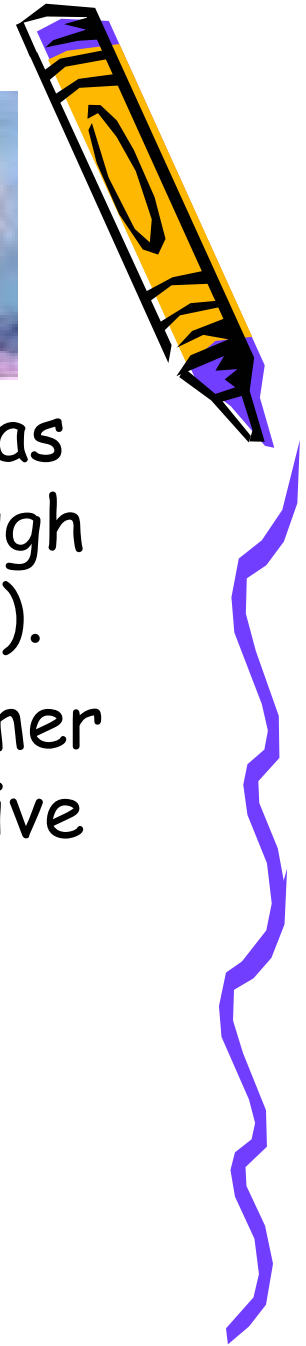


# Grade 4 -continued

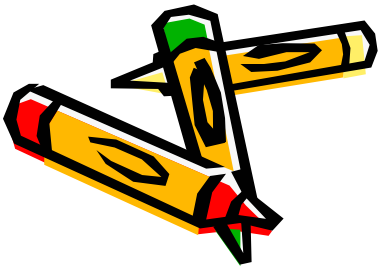
- Without any school support, I began to hate school, to dread it. I was lost. I earned C's and B's in lower level 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes, but spent hours at frustrating school work and hours crying.
- It didn't help that my teacher was not LD friendly, nor that I was still undiagnosed.
- My teacher wouldn't let me use my fingers for arithmetic, so I learned to secretly press them against my leg under the desk. Only in this way could I do arithmetic.



# Fifth Grade (1974-1975)

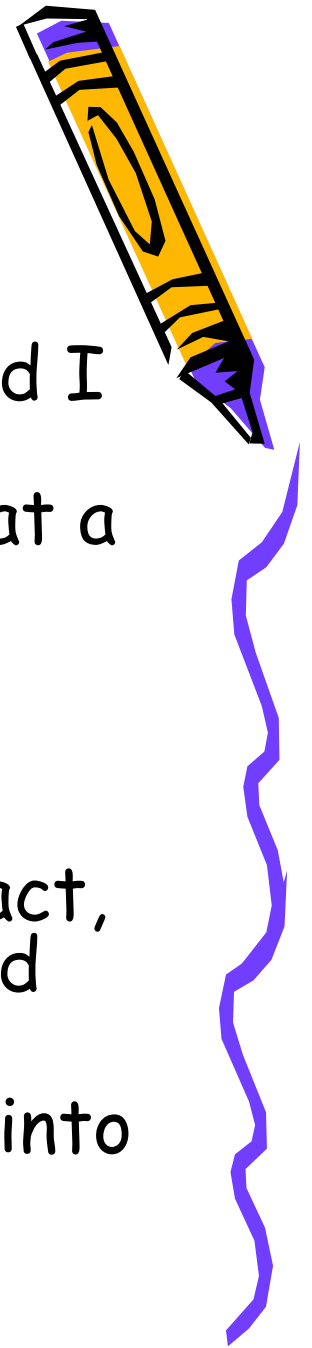
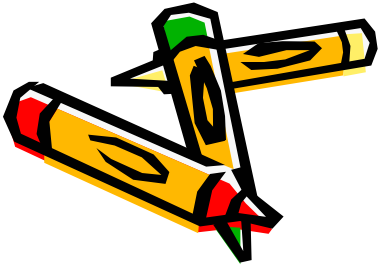


- Mrs. Carter, my fifth grade teacher, was supportive and helpful. I made it through the fifth grade (though it was not easy).
- I found a sport I could play in the summer of my fifth grade year: soccer (defensive positions only).



# Sixth Grade (1975-1976)

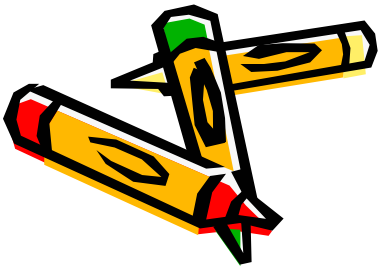
- In grade 6, we moved. Mrs. Cola noticed I used my fingers, and taught me how to multiply by nines using my fingers. What a gift!
- Mrs. Cola saw that I could not spell, so started she me over, from cat to handkerchief. I still cannot spell the latter word without spell-checker (in fact, were it not for my husband, latter would have been later in this presentation).
- The highlight of my year was making it into choir 😊



# Junior High - 7th Grade

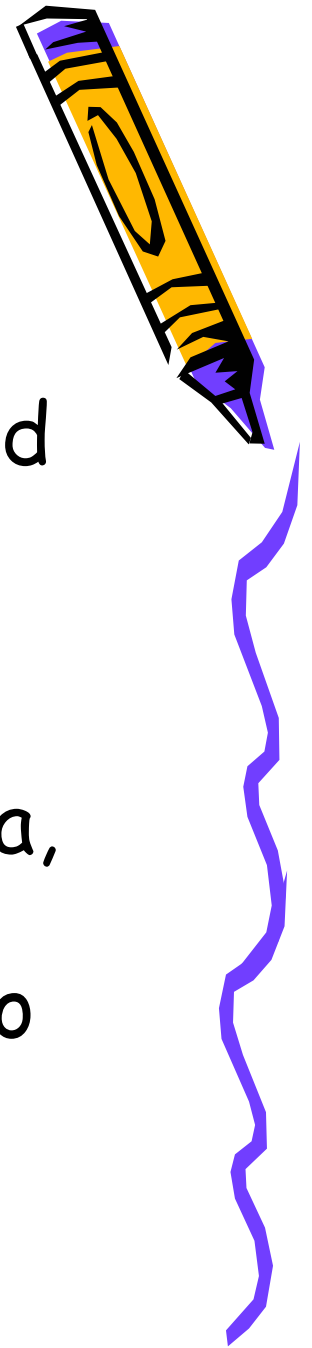
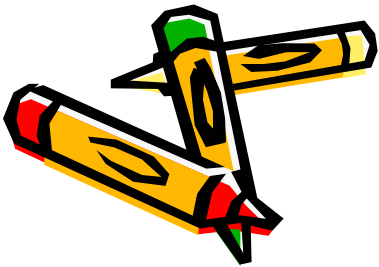
(1976-1977)

- Seventh grade overwhelmed me. There was no single sympathetic teacher to help me. I was misplaced in the higher math group due to my reasoning skills on a standardized test, but it was all arithmetic. That didn't last. Eventually I was moved to the lower math group.
- I was drowning, and there was no support. My parents tried; Mom was great, but I needed more.



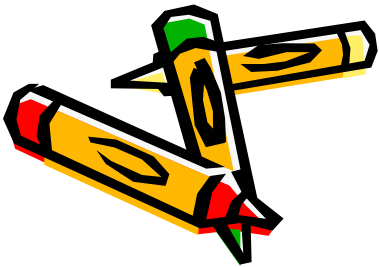
## 7<sup>th</sup> grade - continued

- I missed school due to an illness, and that was the start of a downward spiral. One week had me lost.
- I began to miss school frequently, sometimes due to headaches, nausea, and other signs of stress. I had, in many ways, given up. It was just too much.



# 7<sup>th</sup> Grade continued

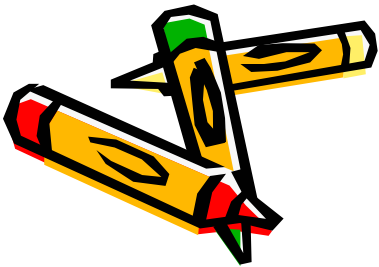
- Mom and Dad fought to get me into the resource room. They succeeded by the end of the year. Mrs. Bikart helped me survive when I was behind. I was socially promoted from grade 7.
  - As a side note, I still could not tell time on an analog watch without counting "5, 10, 15, 20,..." to figure out the minutes. I stopped wearing a watch to school when someone asked me the time one day.





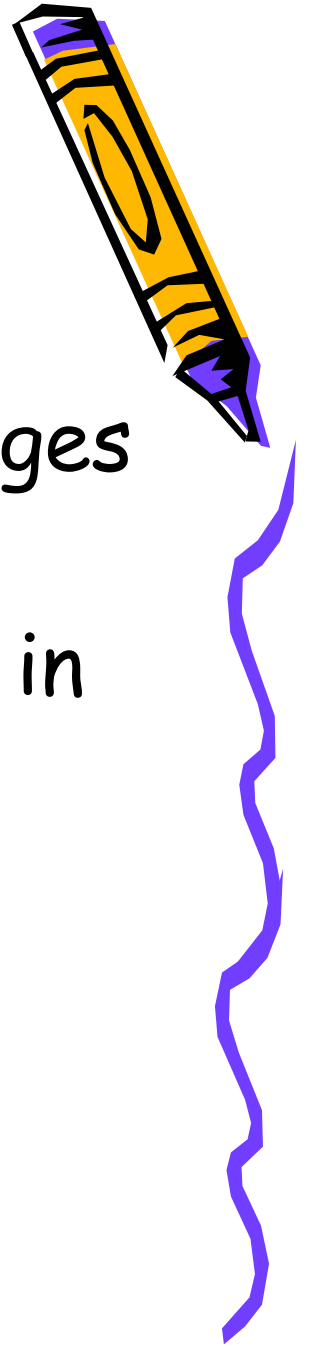
# Eighth Grade (1977-1978)

- My illnesses continued to plague me, so I continued with Mrs. Bickart.
- I was placed in Special Ed. English. Unfortunately, that year most in the class had behavioral problems and the teacher was new. I didn't learn much that year, even when I was there.



# Eight Grade (continued)

- Dad taught me how to do percentages when my teacher could not.
- Some positive things, bright spots in the year, were choir, cooking, and woodshop.
- Again, I was socially promoted.



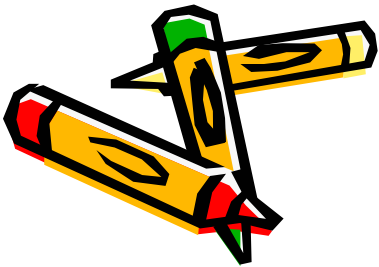
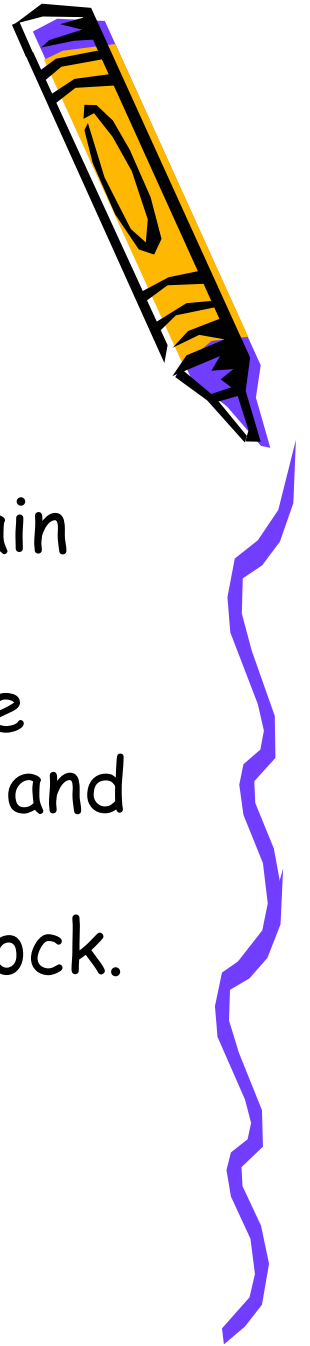
# Ninth Grade (1978-1979)

- Success! I found a math I could do, pre-algebra (special). This relied on reasoning, not arithmetic, and I found I could do that. It gave me hope.
- I was absent less, and began to succeed, with lots of help, in all of my classes. My course load was less than other students (including a double period of home economics and a period of choir), and easier (but not for me). I began to try again, to believe that I could succeed with hard work and help.



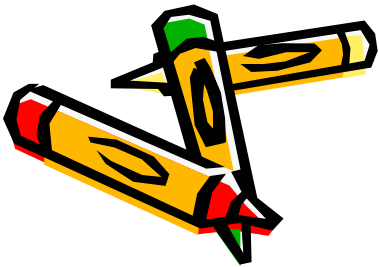
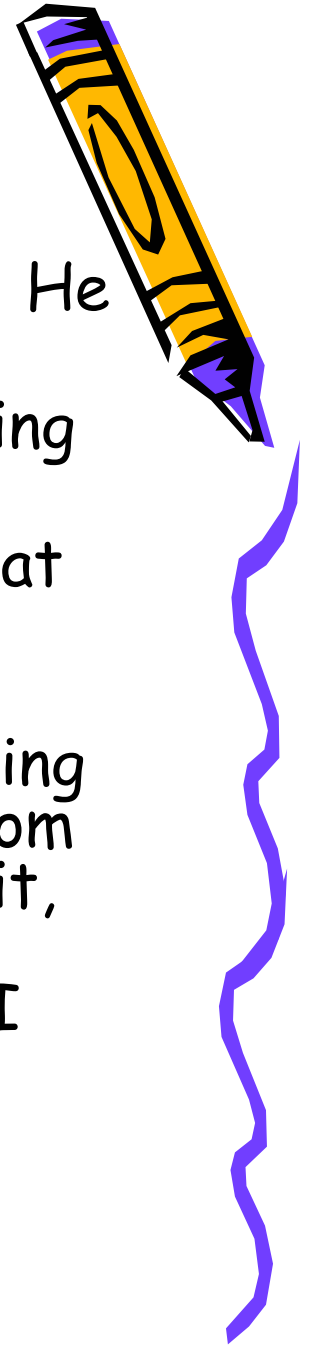
# Ninth Grade continued

- I continued to be in the resource room.
- Mom continued to quiz me again and again before every test
- Mom also proof read everything I wrote (telling me what words were misspelled and needed to be looked up and what sentences needed work). She was my rock.



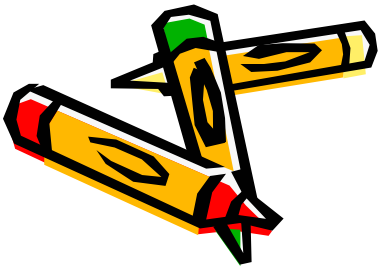
# Ninth Grade - continued

- Mr. Mastrobouno taught me English (Special). He was so good, I began to learn.
- Mr. Welsh made World History come alive, using visual aids and role playing. Excellent!
- Mr. Morocco taught me that I could do math, at least if it was not arithmetic.
- Since I had missed less school (but still a substantial amount), I was in danger of not being allowed in the resource room in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Mom and Dad didn't think I would succeed without it, so I was tested again, this time I was finally labeled - though only with spelling problems. I was not dumb! I was learning disabled!



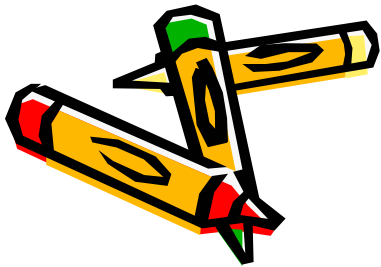
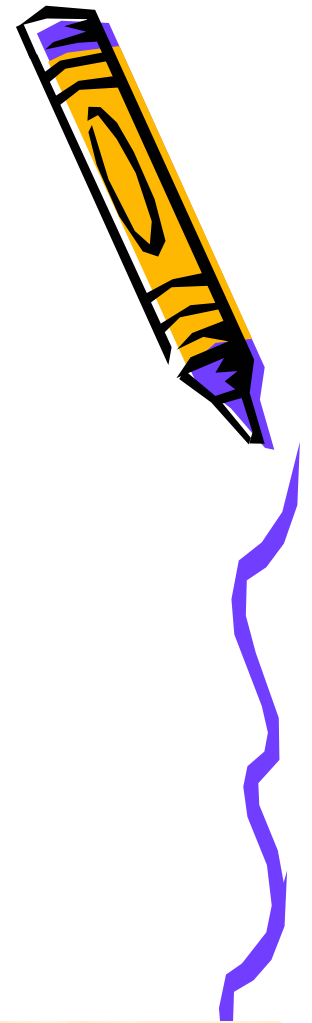
# High School (1979-1982)

- Mrs. Gornick worked with me in the resource room in spelling. I also studied for tests there and at home with Mom. She worked to boost my self-esteem, which had been shattered by prior experience. I loved Mrs. Gornick.
- I continued in special ed. English and the special ed. math track. Even though I had done well in pre-algebra, my slow speed of work, difficulty in arithmetic, and the knowledge that I would not be able to catch up if I was absent from the regular track, kept me in the special track. I needed this.
- Some things continued to be frustrating, especially writing and learning Spanish (I withdrew from Spanish II, I just couldn't do it), but the stage was set for success.



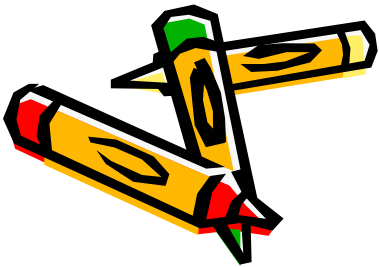
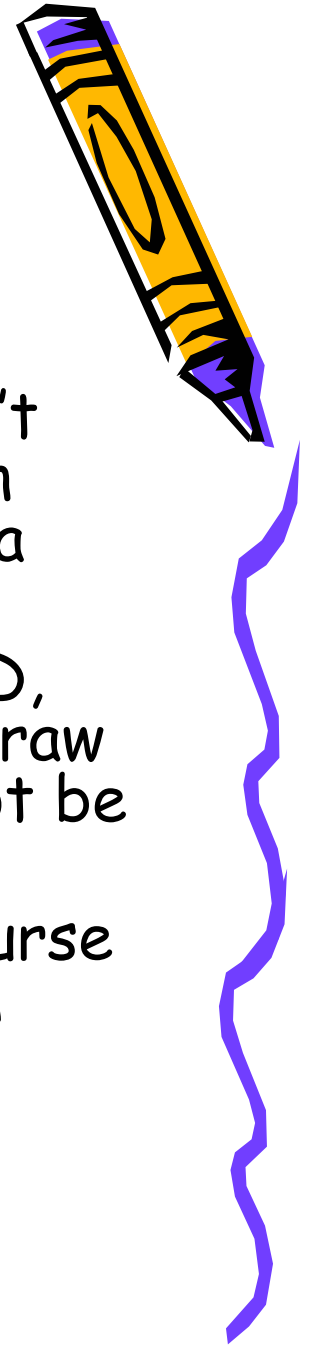
# High School - Continued

- I often came home from school exhausted and needing a nap because the school day took so much energy from me. I would stay up to 12:30 doing homework (I had no social life)
- In 12<sup>th</sup> grade I took my first non-special English class. I didn't pick the higher class, but the less scary Creative Writing and Science Fiction Literature. I did pretty well, thanks to the efforts of my English Special teachers before.
- In 11<sup>th</sup> grade I became a peer tutor in the LOC (resource room), helping others in my math class with their homework. This helped boost my self esteem, and allowed me to think I could be a teacher.



# College

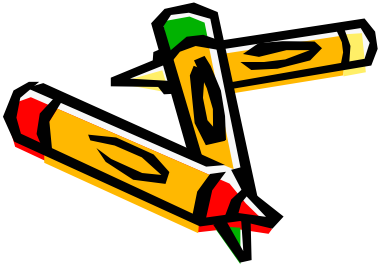
- College composition drove me to tears. I didn't know how to do what she wanted, I didn't even know what she wanted. Mom worked with me a lot. Eventually I succeeded.
- Occasionally I run up against the wall of my LD, but I have learned, with lots of help, how to draw on my strengths. That does not mean it cannot be frustrating (I will always be LD).
- In order to succeed, I must take a smaller course load than my fellow students and need certain accommodations.





# College Accommodations

- Flexible examinations including:
  - 50% more time for objective or multiple choice examinations and quizzes.
  - 100% more time for tests involving essays or math calculations
  - Distraction-free working environment (Learning center or disabled student services recommended)
- Permission to tape record class lectures
- Use of a spell checker in assignments where spelling is to be graded. Additionally, no penalties to be assessed for spelling mistakes during in-class exercises and exams.



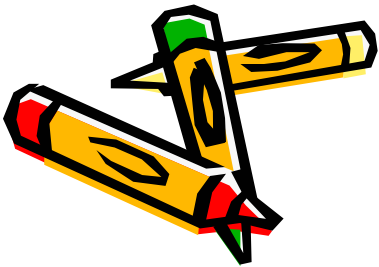
# College Accommodations (continued)

- Ability to use calculator to perform math functions in class and on exams
- Copies of transparencies
- Permission to check out reserved readings for a longer period of time
- Important announcements such as due dates and directions must be provided in both written and verbal form.
- Priority seating - my choice of seat in the front of the class



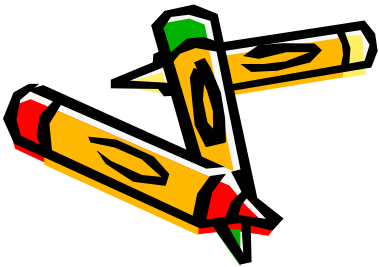
# Today

- If you ask me to spell correctly on a test, I will spend hours studying the spelling, still not get it right, and lose out on the content.
- I still read slower than my non-LD peers (at the speed I normally talk) and often have to re-read things many times in order to comprehend them.
- Everything takes me longer, and I cannot have a social life when learning.
- I still do not know my arithmetic facts, but that is why they invented calculators.



# Today (continued)

- I have difficulty understanding what is said if there are a lot of people talking at the same time. Part of this is likely attentional, but part of it is probably residual auditory discrimination issues.
- I cannot sustain neat handwriting for any length of time and am prone to writer's cramp and broken pencil points.
- Nothing is ever easy when you have a learning disability, but with hard work and lots of help learning to learn, academic success is possible.



# Learning Disabled Doesn't Mean Stupid

- Though there were times I thought I was, I learned at the end of the 9th grade (when I was finally diagnosed), that I am not stupid, I am learning disabled. Mom had told me all along that I was not stupid. She had to keep telling me that.
- My IQ on a standard timed IQ test falls in the superior range when I am not tired (and thus more easily distracted).
- My IQ on an un-timed test visually presented (thus removing some of my LD from the equation) is in the very superior (gifted) range.



# People with LD's have Strengths

- Tenacity and hard work - though I almost gave up in 7th and 8th grades (and barely passed those grades), I ultimately didn't give up.
- Strong abstract reasoning skills (hence my success in mathematics, science, and computers)
- Good imagination and visualization.
- Fairly good foot-eye coordination (soccer) - as long as I stay in defense.



# With Help, People with LD's Can Succeed

## High School:

- 1982: Inducted into the National Honor Society (Brush High School Chapter, South Euclid-Lyndhurst, Ohio).
- 1982: Graduated with honors from Brush High School, 17th in my class of 499 students. (Yes, I was in the special math track and English Special, but isn't 17th still an accomplishment?)



# Notre Dame College (undergraduate - no one knew I am LD):

- 1982 - 1985: Academic Scholarship at Notre Dame College (four year scholarship).
- 1983: Award in Mathematics, Award in English at Notre Dame College of Ohio.
- 1984: Dean's List at Notre Dame College of Ohio (rare, since I have to take a lighter course load than most).





# Kent State University (LD known after fall 1987, but not by all teachers):

- 1986 - 1987: Sherri Jo Luft Memorial Award for Outstanding Scholastic Achievement, KSU.
- 1987: Inducted into Pi Mu Epsilon National Mathematics Honorary, KSU.
- 1988: Dean's List at KSU, Fall Semester.  
Awarded Harshberger Mathematics Scholarship for Spring 1989 at KSU
- 1989: Graduated Magna Cum Laudi from KSU (BSed Mathematics, minor in general science).



# Kent State University (continued)

- 1990: Superior Scholarship, KSU graduate college.
- Additionally, I was invited to join the Honors College (undergrad), but due to the limit to what I can take in a semester, to how much work I can take at once due to my LD, I had to decline.
- I also had to pass by admission into the Gold Key Honor Society (undergrad) because I was short on funds and could not afford the membership dues.



Cleveland College  
of Jewish Studies  
(No one knew I am LD):

- 1997: Max and Eva Apple Memorial Scholarship Award for Excellence in Studies, Cleveland College of Jewish Studies.



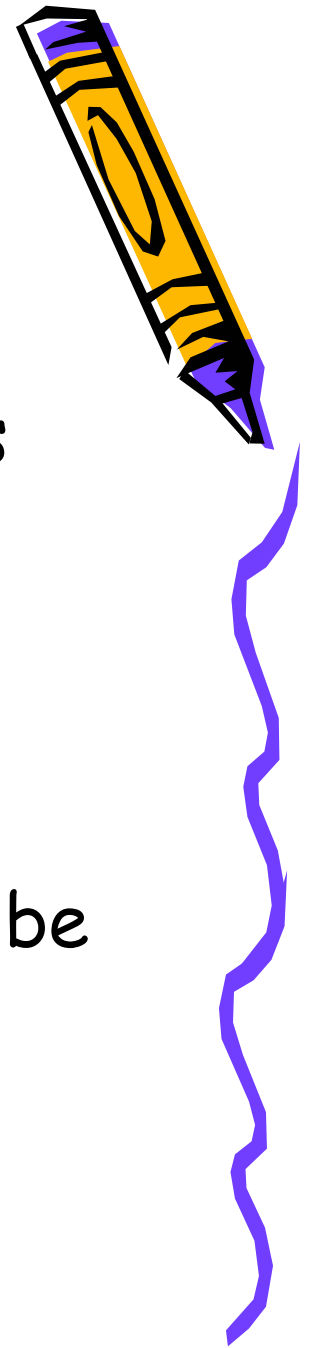
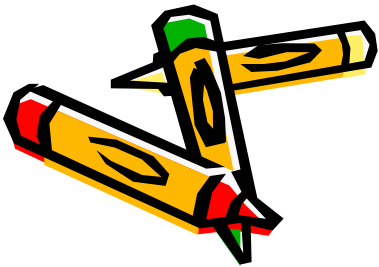
# Professional Recognition (No one knew I am LD):

- 2002: Inducted into the Who's Who Among America's Teachers 2001/2002—Chemistry
- 2006: Inducted into the Who's Who Among America's Teachers 2005/2006



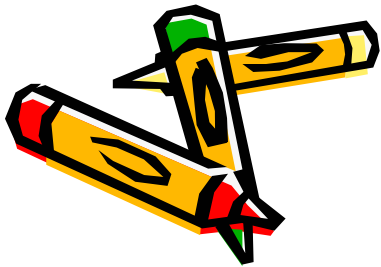
# Things to remember:

- Most students with learning disabilities are of average to gifted in intelligence.
- IQ tests may not always test the true intelligence of an LD student, because their learning disability may interfere.
- Students with learning disabilities may be frustrated when they cannot do something.



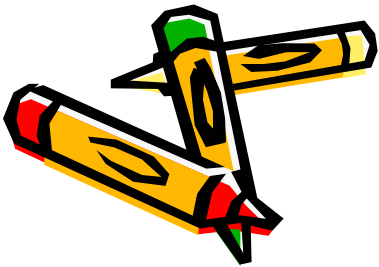
# More things to remember

- Students with LDs need specific and intensive interventions to learn how to learn (to help them get around their LDs).
- Students with learning disabilities will likely need accommodations in some or all of their classes throughout their life.
- Students, with and without LDs, need clear instructions in order to do an assignment successfully. Just as you cannot read a student's mind, they cannot read yours.



# More things to remember

- Students with learning disabilities hate surprises. For example pop quizzes can be a problem for an LD student, because it takes so much time and energy to study and one class where pop quizzes are given can monopolize all of their time to the detriment of others.
- Learning can be exhausting for an LD student, because it takes so much effort and energy.



# More things to remember

- Encouragement will be needed, and you may have to help your students improve their self esteem
- Every student with a learning disability is different. All are unique, special, and can be wonderful, intelligent individuals.
- It is our job as teachers to bring out the full potential of an LD student.

